

Recommendations

5.1. Strengthen Analytical Efforts Around Priority Interests

Some systematic analysis should be made before and after appropriations in order to synthesise the information available on the context and the operations into a format easily used and stored by Ministry personnel. More precise policy controls are required to ensure the coherence of decisions. For this it is not necessary to increase the quantity of reporting (the limited number of personnel and the size of the current archives would argue strongly against this), but rather to develop certain priorities in information – to examine the nature of the indicators needed by the Ministry. It may even be useful to review the content of project proposals and retrospective reporting to make them more concise and to strengthen the narrative explaining changes in the objectives as they have occurred.

In the Great Lakes this should include a political analysis by the Ministry of the ongoing relation between aid and violence, to prevent negative impacts. It should include some rudimentary outline of stated objectives, of the same nature as that developed by the ICRC, and of the impact which meeting objectives will have on regional stability. The end of mission reports written by delegates and secondees, in particular, should be used, and lines of contact with people still in the field maintained. The current altruistic system whereby secondees are handed over entirely to the host institution could be in contradiction with the principles of active multilateralism. There should be a procedure whereby financing proposals are seen and commented on by all the units managing assistance in the region, possibly also the Embassies.

5.2. Preserve Independent Analysis

The implications of a particular course of action should be verified - sometimes independently of the agency of implementation, or even of the political pressures coming from local authorities and peace processes. The problem of independence is made more acute in the special circumstances of the Great Lakes conflict. There has been little effort to nurture a technical analysis of the ongoing situation from pressures of a political nature.

Two options can be envisaged :

either allow an agency to develop and analyse its programmes in complete autonomy, a principle most fully developed by ICRC, whose new detailed reporting manages to keep out sensitive issues; or foster a new capacity serving the Ministry to monitor and assess while ensuring minimum level of confidentiality and neutrality in relation to operational interests.

This second role is difficult for the large agencies to carry out, as they are governed by the need to cooperate with donors and local authorities. It would be difficult to add to the light structures of the Ministry. The most viable alternative would be to pool capacities with like-minded governments or with specialised humanitarian observers such as ECHO. Such a role would also present the advantage of giving ECHO a reason to avoid the temptation of becoming operational (such a role is compatible with ECHO's legal basis, as can be seen from the "Evaluation of EC Humanitarian Operations, Article 20").

The relation of humanitarian aid with authorities, especially with legitimate governments, remains a key constraint on operations. Humanitarian aid implies engagement to protect and assist the civilian population in situations of crisis, generally caused by conflict. A problem humanitarian aid has consistently faced since 1993 has been its co-opting or utilisation by authorities acting on behalf of the population in need of assistance and protection - both in the refugee camps and in refugee-producing countries.

In Rwanda, the conflict is now largely latent, but the government is still a party to it. Humanitarian aid's specificity is to go as directly as possible to the victims, based on an independent (i.e. not influenced by any of the conflicting parties, including the legitimate government's) assessment. Therefore, it is not only advisable, but also necessary, for humanitarian agencies to maintain a constructive dialogue with the government, and not to become (in the government of Rwanda's own formulation) executing agencies of government policies. Humanitarian aid should be conducted in co-operation with the Government to support the people, but not in support of the Government.

The Ministry in Denmark should make decisions for funding conditional on adherence to the Red Cross Code of Conduct. The programme indicators developed by SPHERE would be too detailed for such conditionality. The very notions of independence and impact monitoring should be the focus of efforts. It should be possible for observers to verify whether the Code of Conduct is being respected by an agency inasmuch as circumstances permit.

5.3. Define Regional Priority Concerns, Here Protection

There has not been a humanitarian policy for the conflicts in the region, but rather an agency-funding policy. Some agencies, such as UNHCR, have downgraded protection, while others (such as IOM) have not been supported in assuming protection functions. It is preferable to focus through the agencies on particular aspects of a crisis which have been under-developed (here protection), and to seek to create synergies through other agencies and programmes. This priority aspect should be part of the work of most organisations, so as not to constrain the choices of the Ministry in its agency-by-agency policies. Other criteria could then be added, albeit on a secondary footing (e.g. reporting). This would strengthen the ability of agencies to plan for results.

Protection is justifiably considered as one of the key components of humanitarian action. Protection of the civilian population in general, or of particular population groups, essentially means that they are reassured, i.e. not harmed, physically and mentally, by the parties to the conflict (and its aftermath). For the general civilian population, their fundamental rights are derived from international humanitarian law (Geneva Conventions) and international human rights laws. For defined population groups (prisoners, children, refugees), specific rights are derived from legal instruments addressing their particular status and situation (international refugee law, convention on the rights of the child, etc.).

It is the parties to the conflict, bound by these laws, who should uphold these rights, i.e. protect the population. The problem, and this is where the role of humanitarian agencies come in, is what to do when the parties do not respect these rights. There is a variety of options as expressed aptly in a recent ICRC report as the difference between actors of persuasion, of denunciation, and of substitution. The appropriate measure depends on the circumstances¹.

¹ « Les modes d'action des acteurs humanitaires : critères d'une complémentarité opérationnelle », Paul Bonard, ICRC publications, 1998.

It is risky for humanitarian agencies to then justify novel aid strategies in terms of “conflict resolution” or “prevention” while referring to socio-economic, but not political causes. Development can act as a brake on protection. Although “conflict resolution” is itself a highly political issue, it is as if the political will behind the conflicts were taboo in the aid world. There is a danger that donors will prefer funding such “humanitarian” or “socio-economic” efforts at conflict-resolution, rather than engaging in forceful political dialogue, including the will to hold funding. This could perpetuate situations of structural violence, and prepare tomorrow’s emergencies.
